

12. An Outline of Easter Island Archæology

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This presentation is based upon the findings of the Norwegian Archæological Expedition to Easter Island and the East Pacific. For further details see *Archæology of Easter Island: Reports of the Norwegian Archæological Expedition to Easter Island and the East Pacific*, Vol. I, (Monographs of the School of American Research and Museum of New Mexico, 24, Part 1) edited by Thor Heyerdahl and Edwin N. Ferdon Jr, with William Mulloy, Arne Skjølsvold and Carlyle S. Smith.

The archæology of Easter Island may be divided into three periods: Early, Middle, and Late. Alternate designations are Ahu Moroki, Ahu Moai, and Huri Moai. The periods are based upon stratigraphy of image *ahu* and habitation sites, a study of the quarries at Rano Raraku, radio-carbon dates, seriation, and correlation of legends with archæological facts.

EARLY PERIOD

Time span: From before 400 to about 1100 A.D.

Ceremonial architecture:

The *ahu* with carefully fitted masonry (*ahu moroki*), with sloping landward ramp, with or without wings, associated with a court enclosed by earth embankments or in the form of a leveled area.

Two varieties of masonry: (1) Slabs with long axes horizontal. Irregularities filled with triangular or loaf shaped stones. Outer surfaces smoothed to convex form. (2) Slabs with long axes vertical. Not squared at the top. Irregularities at the tops filled with fitted stones.

Structures oriented frequently in relation to solstice or equinox. Burial cists absent in *ahu*. Crematory areas may belong to this period. Large stones and little earth fill in mass of the structures. Pavement on seaward side as well as on landward side often present.

Statues:

Seemingly absent on *ahu*. Statues may have stood in the court. Usually small, often varying from classic form, faces often more realistic, no topknots.

Statue having legs and small beard at Rano Raraku probably of this period, also Monument 1 of Complex A at Orongo along with *makemake* pictographs with small beards.

Some of the small figurines of hard stone may belong to this period.

Cult activity:

Not positively correlated. *Makemake* probably important.

Solar observatory at Orongo.

Settlement pattern:

Unknown.

Burial:

Not positively identified, perhaps cremation.

Artifacts:

Not correlated. There are two possibilities: (1) The artifact inventory may not differ appreciably from that of the Middle Period, or (2) Habitation sites have not been found.

Radio-carbon dates:

Poike Ditch and associated mound dates 386 ± 100 A.D.

Mound surrounding court at Ahu No. 2, Vinapu, dated 857 ± 200 A.D.

Miscellaneous:

At the two *ahu* at Vinapu, in Complex A at Orongo, at Ahu Te Pito-te-kura, and at several other *ahu* there is evidence for a considerable interval of time between the abandonment of the Early Period structures and the rebuilding of them in the Middle Period. This is measurable, somewhat indirectly, at Vinapu. First, the arbitrary terminal date for the Early Period is set at about 1100 A.D. by selecting an approximate median between the Early Period date of c. 857 A.D. at Ahu No. 2 and the earliest date from Rano Raraku, c. 1206 A.D. Then, the date for the construction of the Middle Period mantle at Ahu No. 1, c. 1516 A.D., is taken as marking the end of a period of abandonment lasting from about 1100 A.D. This date for the resumption of building at Vinapu falls well within the Middle Period and it is possible that this is true at other sites as well. *Ahu* of the style used in the Middle Period may have first appeared as new construction and it may not have been until later that abandoned Early Period structures were rebuilt.

MIDDLE PERIOD

Time span: from c. 1100 to 1680 A.D.

Ceremonial architecture:

The image *ahu* (*ahu moai*) with fully developed wings, sloping ramp on landward side, statues mounted on slabs on central platform.

Masonry of blocks and slabs fitted by selection.

Court is a level expanse without definable boundaries.

Burial cists in parallel lines in the *ahu*.

Small stones and much earth in the mass of the *ahu*.

Pavements of regularly shaped water-worn stones.

No astronomical orientation.
Early Period *ahu* often rebuilt.
Rectangular *ahu*.

Statues:

Classic style, all terminate at pelvic region.
Placed at foot of Rano Raraku and on *ahu*.
Topknots absent initially.
Trend toward taller statues through time.
Intensive activity in quarries at Rano Raraku.

Cult activity:

Bird cult appears and overshadows *makemake* cult at Orongo.
Solar observatory abandoned.

Settlement pattern:

Boat-shaped houses with curbstone foundations, often grouped.
Orongo type house—single and contiguous.
Circular stone houses—single and contiguous.
Tupa (?)
Rock-shelters and mouths of caves.

Burial:

Flesh burials in rectangular cists in image *ahu*.
Long passage-like cists containing burials in rectangular *ahu* of the type used as chicken houses in Late Period.
In cists in *ahu poepoe*.
Probably some cremation.

Artifacts:

Full range of non-perishable material culture as known from ethnography by the end of the period. *Mataa* absent or extremely rare; if present it appears at the very end of the Middle Period.
Adze Type 2-A common. Celt-like form present.
Obsidian perforators common.
Simple and composite fishhooks of human bone common.
Stone vessels present.
Petroglyphs and pictographs of reed boats with sails.
Basalt knives or saws probably of this period.
Metate-like grinding slabs.
Domesticated chickens.
Important absences in contrast with the rest of Polynesia are: *poi* pounders, *tapa* beaters, *kava* graters, pigs, and dogs.

Radio-carbon dates:

Rano Raraku quarry refuse dated, 1206 ± 250 A.D., 1476 ± 100 A.D.

Orongo, Complex A, terminal date, 1420 ± 70 A.D.

Orongo, Complex B, dates, 1416 ± 100 A.D., 1540 ± 100 A.D., 1576 ± 100 A.D.

Site E-2, date, 1526 ± 100 A.D.

Vinapu, Ahu No. 1, crematorium, date 1228 ± 200 A.D.

Vinapu, Ahu No. 1, secondary mantle, date 1516 ± 100 A.D.

Tepeu, Ahu No. 1, grave, date 1629 ± 150 A.D.

Poike Ditch fill, date 1676 ± 100 A.D. (Terminal date for period)

Miscellaneous:

The Middle Period ends with the battle at the Poike Ditch, genealogical date of c. 1680 and radio-carbon date of c. 1676.

LATE PERIOD

Time span: c. 1680 to 1868 A.D.

Ceremonial architecture:

Semi-pyramidal *ahu*

Ahu avanga

Image *ahu* converted to semi-pyramidal form after fall of statues (*huri moai*) by placing mantle of loose stones over the inland surface.

Cave-like chambers and burial cists on, or intrusive into, Middle Period image *ahu*.

Crude masonry of small stones.

Statues:

No evidence of activity in quarries at Rano Raraku.

Some crude statues may have been made of red scoria.

Vertical slabs set up on some *ahu*.

Cult activity:

Bird cult continues at Orongo.

Fires built in front of statues at Rano Raraku.

Settlement pattern:

Boat-shaped houses rebuilt from parts of Middle Period houses.

Masonry rooms added to mouths of caves.

Refuge caves with masonry entrances.

Rock shelters and caves.

Earlier ruins re-occupied.

Rectangular *ahu* converted to chicken houses.

Burial:

Flesh and secondary burial.

Irregular cists in mantles in image *ahu*.

Random placement under fallen statues, in front of standing statues at Rano Raraku, and in rock shelters, in caves, and under cairns.

In *ahu poepoe*, *ahu avanga*, and rectangular *ahu*.

Some cremation.

Artifacts:

Full range of non-perishable material culture as known from ethnography at the beginning of the period. Considerable trade goods from Europe by end of period.

Mataa common and may be limited to this period.

Adze Type 2-A common.

Obsidian chisels common.

Fewer obsidian perforators, possibly replaced by trade iron implements.

Obsidian scrapers more numerous, possibly more wood carving than earlier.

Ground stone saw present.

Grooved pebbles.

Human bone fishhook with barb on shank common.

Petroglyphs often on standing statues at Rano Raraku.

Radio-carbon dates:

Poike Ditch, fill, 1676 ± 100 A.D. marks beginning of period.

Orongo, Complex B, 1736 ± 100 A.D., 1857 (+ 100, - 200) A.D.

Vinapu, Ahu No. 1, 1837 (+ 100, - 200) A.D.

Rano Raraku, 1846 ± 100 A.D.

Miscellaneous:

The Late Period was terminated by missionary work in 1868.